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## **Kilshinahan Mass Rock by Ann-Marie Desmond, Ballycatten**

### **The Setting**

On the western side of Kilbrittain Parish in the town land of Kilshinahan lies a hidden and often forgotten feature of ancient ecclesiastical history-a jewel of a Mass Rock. It is on the land of Iah Burke (Husband, Michael & Son, Aiden, RIP.) and is marked on the roadside by a signpost marked Carraig an Aifreann-MASS ROCK (L6088). The Archaeological Inventory of West Cork situates it at OS 123:10:2 (359 282), and describes it as a “*Rock outcrop, in secluded stream valley, where Mass was said in Penal times according to local information. On ledge above is stone cut holy water font. In occasional use*”, (10-4-1986). This source also refers to a Mass Rock in Barleyfield (p.353) and to a nearby “*large sub-circular enclosure (diam.200m) with Kilshinahan Church (3154), and a graveyard (3229).*”<sup>1</sup> At the entrance to the Mass Rock is a memorial plaque erected to commemorate for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Irish Famine (1845-49).

This Mass Rock is set at a geographical `cross-roads` on a tributary of the River Argideen, dividing Kilbrittain Parish from Timoleague Parish, dividing the town land of Kilshinahan from the town land of Burrane (land of Gerdie and Mary Lehane) and serves as a visible reminder of the division of the diocese of Cork from that of the diocese of Ross. Fr. James Coombes, Historian, former PP of Timoleague, published literature which indicates that the dioceses of Cork, Ross and Cloyne were all under one Bishop during the times in which this Mass Rock was in use.<sup>2</sup> In 2012 Timoleague Parish claimed Kilshinahan Mass Rock to be in Burrane, Timoleague on one of their twenty one granite plaques (erected as part of their parish`s history time-line) so in the interest of historical accuracy I asked the parish priest Fr. Hickey to amend it, which he duly did. Nugent`s (2013) History of Irish Mass Rocks also refers to this rock as the Burrane Mass Rock.<sup>3</sup> Maybe part of the old Kilshinahan Parish was in Timoleague, and the other half in Kilbrittain-a document in the Cork Diocesan records from 1579 refers to a dispute regarding tithes of the half of Kylshenygyn.<sup>4</sup> (It may also explain why families along this border feel they half-belong in both parishes!). Cill Sinchil is mentioned in the tax list of the Pope in 1199 and in 1588 in Elizabethan documents as a church and chapel. There is no known official written record of Kilshinahan Mass Rock in the Kilbrittain or Timoleague Church archives; written records anywhere of events that far back are sparse, not to mention events which were deemed illegal, so as historians we have to glean from other sources what happened nationally and deduce that similar events happened here. Other difficulties in sourcing facts from that time involve academic translations as most Catholic Church work was done through Latin or Gaelige. One source is even written in Italian `*leggi penale*` (penal laws) (1730s), by a bishop in Limerick to the president of the Irish College in Rome!<sup>5</sup>

There is much anecdotal and sometimes exaggerated accounts of what happened in Ireland during the Penal Days when Catholics were forbidden to practice their religion, attend school or hold legal positions (among many other Penal Laws) due to English control, spanning from

Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy in 1534 to the Catholic Emancipation Act 1829, but in particular the years 1640-1750's. This article is not a claim to authority or expertise on the subject of Mass Rocks or Popery Laws, but a genuine attempt to understand better and shed light on what happened to our ancestors in this area at that time. Did they use this sacred site often? How did they know if Mass would be held, and at what time? Also how severe were the enforcing of the popery laws in this area?

I have great personal interest in this site because my father's family have farmed in the town land of Kilshinahan as far back as the Mass Rock days. Throughout my childhood walks to this sacred site were a frequent ritual as were stories about the rock and the risks our ancestors took to keep their faith. My mother's mother was Catherine Burke (married O'Leary, Skeaf) sister of Tim Burke (father of Michael Burke), and she used to add to the intrigue of this area by telling us stories of buried treasure and of a gold chalice hidden on these lands which her uncle Tim used to recount to herself and her siblings as they were growing up. Apparently Tim's father knew of the whereabouts of the chalice but did not divulge the information to anyone. The chalice was purported to be hidden during Cromwell's time (1649-53) and belonged to the Kilshinahan church referred to on the Ordinance Survey map (3154) on page one.

The geographical location was evidently well thought out; a safe distance from the main road (the road ran from Bandon through Baurleigh at that time) in a wooded area for concealment-the Mass Rock is overshadowed by trees. On leaving the side-road (off of the main Bandon to Timoleague route) one enters a field on the right and after twenty feet inside, to the left, there is a steep descent to a lower level (there are steps there today) beside a stream, which served to drown out the sound of the priest's voice, as well as providing water for cleansing and blessings. I recall my mother years ago, one Sunday afternoon, standing next to this streamlet of the Argideen River quoting Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) to it!; "*Men may come and men may go, but you go on forever!*". The constancy of the water of life and of the cycles of nature is particularly poignant in this quiet, secluded hallowed space. Mary O'Sullivan, Kilshinahan recently described it as "*Nature's Cathedral*". Bishop (2014) writes in her dissertation on Mass Rocks in Co. Cork "*The distribution of Mass Rock sites in the diocese of Cork and Ross shows a close correlation between Mass Rock sites and water sources. Raftery (1994) identifies that rivers figure prominently in Celtic mythology and a significant number of Mass Rock sites are located adjacent to streams and rivers such as those at Kilshinahan and Glenville*"<sup>6</sup>

The area at ground level, adjacent to the river, is a large flat space and most likely the spot on which the congregation stood to hear the Mass (which was said in Latin up to 1962-65 Vatican II). A large flat rock overlooks the stream providing a natural elevated position for the altar, and a space for the priest to stand at a height in order to be seen by the assembly. Even today one can appreciate that Kilshinahan Mass Rock is a special space, a sacred spot where "*The silence of time becomes almost audible*".<sup>7</sup>

## Mass during Penal Times

Fr. Christy Walsh (1981 homily at the Mass Rock) captured the atmosphere of the Mass Rock perfectly when he explained; *“Today the whole area is full of life-young and old are gathered here from far and near but every other day it is a glen of solitude- glean an uaigneas-silence broken only by waters rushing down to the Argideen; the sighing of branches in the breeze, the whistle and call of bird life and the far away lowing of cattle in the meadow. It is indeed a place of meditation, reflection and prayer”*.

Fr. Walsh continued *“The ground you are standing on is holy ground, for here our people came together for Mass not in pleasant situations like today but in very different circumstances-in frost and snow.....their souls trembling at the cry of the wolves up the glens of Skeaf or the sounds of the Bandon sasannachs galloping down from Clashavoon to the Argideen River”*.

## The Mass Rock

Primroses grow by the old stone steps  
That leads on to a secluded rock  
In that quiet glen in Penal Times  
A priest prayed there with his flock  
On Sundays and on feast days  
By the stream the faithful knelt  
At the rock altar the priest offered Mass  
Head bowed in prayer heartfelt.

(Poet- Margaret O'Driscoll, Bandon; her husband was born in Kilshinahan)

P. O` Gallachair`s, *“Clogher`s Altars of the Penal Days: A Survey”*<sup>8</sup> explains that the priest decided the venue for the Mass site; some centrally situated in a parish, others on the borders of two or more parishes for convenience; the more intense the persecution the more remote and inaccessible the places selected for Mass. An eye-witness in the Diocese of Clogher, William Carleton (1798-1869) told that; *“during the winter months and wet weather in general both sexes who attended worship were obliged to bring with them small tresses of either hay or straw on which to kneel”*(p. 101). *The open-air Mass-rock and garden was to be regarded as merely an emergency place of worship, only to be resorted to when persecution or the overcrowding of a temporary shelter demanded it”* (p. 99) Hugh Mc Mahon, Archbishop of Armagh (1714-37) is quoted by O`Gallachair to describe the time of Masses and how people communicated with each other about it. *“The exercise of Religion is carried on mostly at night and hurriedly, so there is no time for teaching catechism or preaching. Over the country people may be seen, on meeting,*

*signaling to each other on their fingers, the hour Mass is due to begin. To hear Mass these people rise early and travel through frost and snow; some, many advanced in years, leave their homes the previous day to make sure that they arrive in time at the place where Mass is to be celebrated” (p.102)*

In 1955 Rev. Patrick Henehy, pp, Dunmanway wrote about some Cork Mass Rocks around Caheragh in *‘The Fold’* magazine, “*They are in widely scattered hollows of the hills. Peaks around were the look-out stations for the watchers. These have a wide field of view. When the alarm was given it was easy to escape along the ridges under the sky-line, or down the glens, far from houses, no man could be accused of being responsible for unlawful assembly or promotion of the banned Mass*”.<sup>9</sup>

### **Historical, Religious and Political Context**

To appreciate the historicity of this religious site one has to situate it first within the context of the time of its genesis, and not only from an Irish Catholic perspective, but within its broader social, political and cultural influences. The site dates back to a time of unrest in Ireland which had its foundations in Henry V111’s break with the Pope in Rome during the sixteenth century, King Henry of England (who also claimed to rule Ireland) appealed to Pope Clement V11 for an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon in 1553 as she was unable to bear him a male heir. The Pope refused him, not least because Catherine’s nephew King Charles V of Spain controlled Rome at that time. Henry, influenced by Reformers on the continent, such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, decided to set up his own church, the Church of England (Anglican Church). He passed the Oath of Supremacy in 1534 which insisted that all his subjects recognize him as the head of the Church, not the Pope. Henry V111 then decreed that all the monasteries throughout England and Ireland to be closed. He passed the Act of Dissolution in 1536 which allowed him to confiscate all the monastic land and to sell them for his own benefit (See Coombes, 1969).<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Henry continued to attend Mass and made no liturgical changes other than omitting any mention of the Pope from the Canon of the Mass. Henry’s son Edward (1537-1553) abolished the practice of Mass by passing the Act of Uniformity (Acts 3 & 4, 1552); he decreed penalties against anyone who engaged in rites other than Protestant Services. This is when the Catholics in Ireland began worshipping at secret, hidden, well-concealed, secluded sites in order to hear mass. Edward’s Catholic sister Mary (Known as Bloody Mary, daughter of Henry V111’s first marriage, to Catholic Catherine of Aragon) repealed the Act of Supremacy in 1553, reverting England to Catholicism. Five years later Queen Mary died and Protestant Elizabeth 1 (daughter of Henry’s second marriage, to Anne Boleyn) became queen. She passed the Act of Supremacy again (June 1559). This involved three key changes in religion, according to a lecture given by Rev. Edwin Burton DD, 1911;

1. *Withdrawal of obedience to the Pope.*
2. *New religious hierarchy to replace the Marian bishops*

### 3. Services according to the Book of Common Prayer

(Lecture on: *The Penal Laws and the Mass*).<sup>11</sup>

Queen Elizabeth 1, like many of her contemporaries believed that it was easier to control her subjects if they professed the same religion as her. (In Germany the Peace of Augsburg Treaty was agreed (1555) tolerating both Catholics and Protestants living within the Holy Roman Empire). This tolerance was not to be had in Ireland due to English fears around Catholic Spain using Ireland as a stepping stone to attack Protestant England. Philip 1 of Spain had been married to Queen Mary, so issues of succession to the crown also prevailed (The Spanish Armada, 1588). The English also viewed Ireland's loyalty to Rome as loyalty to a foreign power; thus a threat to their rule. The Penal laws or Popery Laws were targeted at confining resistance to the new Anglican religion by Dissenters, Jews, Quakers, and in particular, Catholics. Protestants felt that Catholicism or Popery was not even a Religion due to the Pope's claim to dispensation of sins through indulgences as well as issues surrounding the belief of the real presence in the body and blood of the Eucharist (Anglicans do not agree with Transubstantiation but Consubstantiation). *"The pope's power to grant indulgences, seen by Protestants as a claim to dispensation over the entire moral law, raised the specter of priest-craft and its perceived dangers from superstition and backwardness to a terrifying "arbitrary" tyranny that would, if allowed to infiltrate the monarchy or other positions of power, destroy all British liberties and even true Christianity itself"*<sup>12</sup> These laws varied in intensity and in context both in England, Ireland and the Netherlands, and even varied regionally, yet their objectives were similar. In Ireland, particularly in the Munster region, it seems that she was more interested in land acquisition than in converting the natives to Anglicanism.

#### **Variations in Regions and in Intensity**

In 2011 John Morrill wrote that the causes of the Penal Laws were full of paradoxes and inevitabilities. He claims that the penal laws in England from the early 1580's (under Elizabeth) were more severe on practice than the Irish penal laws in 1695-1709 which were more severe on Catholic landholders. *"It was a capital offence to be a seminary-trained priest in England and a felony knowingly to entertain a priest in a Catholic home. There were heavy fines for attending Mass (£100 per Mass) and it was a felony to possess any distinctively Catholic books or Religious objects"*.<sup>13</sup> In retaliation to Elizabeth's treatment of Catholic subjects the then Pope, Pius V, publishing a papal bull *Regnans in Excelsis* in which he called Elizabeth a heretic bastard usurper and called on all good Catholics to work for her overthrow.<sup>14</sup> Fr. Coombes' history of Timoleague writes that *"the real persecution did not come until after the Desmond rebellion (1578-83) and when it did come the monks and religious became a hunted people"*.<sup>15</sup> From then on people had Mass said secretly in their homes or at Mass sites such as Mass Rocks or at Field-Altars, until Catholic Emancipation was won in 1829. Butlers (2006) work quoted by Bishop asserts that the Mass Houses with a safe-house support network existed for the Catholic gentry

whereas the poorer people, usually controlled by Gaelic lordships went to the Mass Rock. *“The coastal areas of West Cork show a high preponderance of Mass Rock sites, supporting the hypothesis that the use of Mass Rocks is reflective of a more traditional or Gaelic strand of Irish Catholic culture”*.<sup>16</sup>

Queen Elizabeth died in 1603 and her successor King James 1 openly declared his hatred of Catholicism; *“he issued a proclamation banishing all Catholic missionaries from the kingdom and enforced penal laws with the utmost vigour”*.<sup>17</sup> In 1629 the House of Commons condemned Lord Deputy to Ireland, Lord Falkland’s toleration of Catholicism so he was replaced by Lord Loftus, with Richard Boyle, Earl of Cork as Lord Justice. Both were united in their hatred of Catholicism<sup>18</sup>. Written on the entry wall to Bandon during Boyle’s time (1621-79) were the lines; *“Jew, Infidel, or Atheist may enter here, but not a Papist”*. Someone wrote the following response under it; *“Who wrote these words composed them well, the same are written on the Gates of Hell”*.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the 1640’s relations between Protestants and Catholics intensified, due to the Ulster Rebellion and circulation of antipopery allegations of atrocities carried out by Catholics against Protestants fuelled the flames of hatred and suspicion. *“A letter, apparently written by the Earl of Cork (Robert Boyle, mentioned above) and printed in London repeated assertions that rebels had tortured and executed English prisoners near Barrymore, and then massacred the Protestant inhabitants; pregnant women were supposedly disemboweled here too.* (A letter from the earle of Corke to the state at Dublin (1642), pp1-2).<sup>20</sup> Biased images being presented to English audiences was, Gibney writes, *“A horrific attempt at sectarian genocide in Ireland”* (p. 71). Cromwell came to Ireland in 1649 to seek revenge on the Catholics. Attempts by the rebels to balance the accounts went unheard and unpublished, for example, *“A declaration made by the rebels in Ireland”* (1644).<sup>21</sup> In 1747 and 1775 Fr. John Curry, a Catholic activist, published reviews on 1641 Rebellion and the impact of the English Civil Wars on Ireland (1775) in which he *“traced all Ireland’s misfortunes to the English invasion in the twelfth century and its subsequent rule (barren, barbarous, bloody) in Ireland”*.<sup>22</sup>

### **Understanding Mass Rocks from a Twenty-First Century Lens**

Catholic clerical historians understandably focused on the religious dimensions of the penal laws and their cruelty to the Irish, for example, Fr. Holland, a priest in the diocese of Cork termed the popery laws as the ‘black penal laws’. His account of the penal laws in West Cork tell of the *“betrayal of the Treaty of Limerick”*, which aspired to *“the death of the Catholic Religion”*.<sup>23</sup> Accounts of priest-catchers and executions back up these theories as do poems such as *“Anseo I Lár an Ghleanna”* by Seán Mac Fhearaí.<sup>24</sup>

New Perspectives on the historiography of the Penal Laws suggest that earlier accounts of their severity were exaggerated and tinged with emotionalism. Critics suggest that there was no concerted plan to eradicate Catholicism but Irishness and Catholicism being so inextricably linked served to blur the boundaries between conquest and conversion. Most reviews today

identify property acquisition as England's key motivating factor. Land settlement remained the key source of division on the island long after the Penal Laws were repealed;

*"The most recent, exhaustive study of any of the penal laws, namely the laws for disarming Catholics and preventing their education overseas, concludes that they were an explicit response to the danger perceived by the Irish Protestants from both the Catholic majority on the island and the newly reinvigorated (and the newly Jacobite) Irish military diaspora on the continent: the so called wild geese whose departure had been facilitated by the Treaty of Limerick, and who were perceived to be in a position to garner support from traditional Catholic allies in Europe".<sup>25</sup>*

In 1689 the Toleration Act in England was copied in Ireland, requiring the licensing and registration of Catholic priests but interestingly, it did not place any restrictions on where the Mass could be held. *"Whatever happened later, it was not the intention of the Acts of 1695-1715 to place restrictions on where Mass could be said".<sup>26</sup>*

According to Fr. C. Walsh's homily at Kilshinahan Mass Rock (1981) a Capuchin priest Bro. Edward wrote of *"the devotion of the people"* in this area in a letter dated 1656 after he visited a fellow Capuchin priest, Fr. Michael whose ministry extended from here to Kilbrittain, Rathclaren and Courceys. *"They follow Fr. Michael from place to place to receive the sacraments. He says Mass twice daily before sunrise. He offers Mass only in some hidden place at which only a small number is present. There is risk of so many enemies in English Garrisons"*. Fr. Walsh explains in the same homily that some elderly priests were allowed to stay put as long as they had two gentlemen guarantors to pay £50 each per priest. He said the authorities did little about priests being smuggled back into Ireland and that some landlords gave corners here and there for a priest to say Mass; *"Sealy gave Gleann Na mbrathar in Barleyfield and it seems that Robert Travers gave a site in Kilshinahan here"*. Fr. Walsh mentioned that in spite of priest-hunters (Sean Dearg-Nash, Brinny and Ralf Clear, Bandon); the clergy were on the increase. In 1743 a Fr. Lar Calnan of Garrendruig built a large Mass-house, a short distance from the rock (3154 OS Map described on p.1). Kilbrittain parish absorbed Kilshinahan and four or five more smaller parishes to form the present day parish boundaries and by 1790 the present day parish church replaced the Mass-house of Kilshinahan. A Protestant Chapel was built around this time across the field to the east on what is Mary O'Sullivan's farm today.

At a national level, Fr. Nicholas Sheehy (Clogheen parish) is identified as the last priest to be executed in 1766 under penal legislation by public hanging in Clonmel, not for saying Mass as much as alleged treason for supporting the rebel activities of his downtrodden parishioners who were members of the Whiteboys Movement.<sup>27</sup> George III passed several acts for the relief of the Penal Laws from 1778, 1782, 1792 and 1793. *"No person shall be impeached or prosecuted for being a papist or being educated in popish religion or for hearing or saying Mass"*.<sup>28</sup> Efforts for Catholic Emancipation took place in 1823-29 led by Daniel O'Connell, but unrest over the land question and the issue of tithes continued long afterwards, for example, in 1832 the Vicar of Timoleague Church of Ireland was murdered in a field near Baurleigh School.<sup>29</sup>

## **From Penal Days to Present Day**



We can deduce that the Mass-Rock fell into disuse from 1743 onwards when the penal laws relaxed and the Irish could once again practice their faith in Mass Houses or Churches. Earlier Christian authorities had an unhealthy fear of outdoor worship due to Pantheism being associated with Celtic and Tribal Religions. (Today this fear is replaced by an understanding of God's revelation through the beauty of nature and its forces surrounding us.) By 1840 Kilshinahan Catholic Church was not in use, so over time, this site has become overgrown and forgotten. John O'Mahony (Maryboro) remembers local efforts to clean up the Mass Rock and Church at the bequest of Fr. Coakley in 1959/60. John worked alongside his brother Barry, Ned Ahern, Dan Ahern (Burrane) Charlie Dineen (Kilshinahan), Con Lawton (Skeaf) and Gerry Mc Carthy (Ballycatten). Stones were sourced from the grounds of Kilbrittain Castle to strengthen the steps down to the Mass Rock, because its natural rock was uneven. Fr. Coakley (apparently, a great business man!) seemed to have gotten great satisfaction from the fact that the `Protestant` stones were being laid to improve a Catholic site (I remember Fr. Coakley's name as he reprimanded my father, and many more, for attending the funeral of Protestant neighbors. Such breeches were deemed so serious that people were sent to the Bishop to confess!). In 1981 renewed efforts of locals prepared the site for a Mass at the rock, led by Fr. Dan O'Flynn. A Mass Rock sign across the road from the Mass Rock was erected around this time, and wire put around at the edge of the rock/altar space, probably for health and safety reasons.

John O'Mahony also remembers mixing cement for the 1997 Famine Commemoration plaque which was erected to the right of the entrance gate of the Mass Rock. He was assisted by Paddy O'Neill (Maryboro) and Sean Burke (Ballycatten), Frank Hunt (Ballycatten) and Charlie Dineen, among others. The congregation met near Tadgh Calnan's (Burrane) and marched up the by-road to the Mass-Rock. Fr. William Ahern and the local Church of Ireland Minister together blessed the plaque at the road-side and the oration was given by Mrs. Eileen Lyons, Bandon.<sup>29</sup> Mass was not said that year at the rock. About four years ago Fr. Cremin (Kilbrittain) and Fr. Hickey (Timoleague) concelebrated Mass here, and a Fr. Grant O'Neill, an Australian Missionary priest has said Mass a few times when he's home on vacation. The Crowley clan have also used it for reunion Masses over the years.

Our Mass Rocks are a very important and treasured symbol of our heritage, our religion and of our Irish culture; they are an intrinsic aspect of our national identity. They remind us of the endurance of our ancestors and their determination to stay faithful to their faith. Throughout the last thirty years I have brought class groups to see the Mass Rock as part of their History and Religion courses. From their modern day lens they find it difficult to comprehend why anyone would risk life or limb to attend Mass. I impress upon them that the Mass Rock was to the Irish as the Catacombs were to the ancient Romans; both groups exercised agency and resistance despite the threat of martyrdom.

Pope John Paul II captured that special connection between the Irish and the Mass Rock in his Pheonix Park homily, September 1979.

*"As I stand here, in the company of so many hundreds of thousands of Irish men and women, I am thinking of how many times, across how many centuries, the Eucharist has been celebrated in this land. How many and how varied the places where Mass has been offered—in stately mediaeval and in splendid modern cathedrals ; in early monastic and in modern churches; at Mass rocks in the glens and forests by "hunted priests", and in poor thatch-*

*covered chapels, for a people poor in worldly goods but rich in the things of the spirit, in "wake-houses" or "station houses", or at great open-air hostings of faithful—on the top of Croagh Patrick and at Lough Derg. Small matter where the Mass was offered, for the Irish, it was always the Mass that mattered. How many have found in it the spiritual strength to live, even through the times of greatest hardship and poverty, through days of persecution and vexations”* (Extract from John Paul’s homily, 1979).

To conclude this article I attach a copy of my interview with Iah Burke, landowner of Mass Rock: Dated 11-09-2016, 11 am.

**Ann-Marie:** Iah, I’m here to ask you a few questions about the Mass Rock, is that alright with you?

**Iah:** That fine, work away!

**Ann-Marie:** How many years have you been living here in Kilshinahan?

**Iah:** Since 1967

**Ann-Marie:** Have you seen many changes in the Mass Rock since you’ve been here?

**Iah:** Yes I seen a lot of change, they worked woeful hard at cleaning it up over 30 years ago.

**Ann-Marie:** Would that have been for the Mass in 1981?

**Iah:** Yes

**Ann-Marie:** And what was it like before that?

**Iah:** Ah, it was nearly derelict. They cleaned all around it, did a great job, local men, I can’t remember them all but there was Charlie Dineen, John Mahony, Seanie Burke, Paddy and Dan Desmond, Seanie Barry, Frank Hunt, Con and Gerdie Lehane.

**Ann-Marie:** Can you remember the times when Mass was said here?

**Iah:** The last Mass was about three or four years ago, I remember Gerdie Lehane did a lot that time, and the sign (signpost for Mass Rock), do you remember the sign was across the road? Charlie Dineen was there, I saw him with my own two eyes, putting up the new sign, on the Mass Rock side. It’s in the right place now, over at the site! They set the laurels around the entrance to it too.

**Ann-Marie:** What is the procedure for access to the Mass Rock, say before an official Mass?

**Iah:** Shur, who would object to a Mass being said? No one and it would be no harm to have Mass said there again as soon as possible!

**Ann-Marie:** If people drop in to see the Mass Rock are there any difficulties around that?

**Iah:** It’s open to anyone who wants to visit—just down the road; they can work away. Last year John Donovan, Abbeymahon knocked on my door asking permission to go down to the old church and I said of course, work away, John.! When we were below in the old house (farmhouse) the passage through was clear (across the main road directly from farmhouse entrance a by-road leads into the Church ruins and leads up to the Mass Rock), but now it’s all overgrown and in winter there’s a stream of water across the passage.

**Ann-Marie:** Iah, have you heard any stories or legends about the Mass Rock?

**Iah:** I know that Tim Burke gave permission for the holy water font from the old church to be brought up to the Mass Rock, but I don’t know when. He also spoke of a lost chalice and wondered where did it go to? I know he regretted not finding out more about it, that he had just let it lie.

**Ann-Marie:** But couldn’t someone like Paddy (Clifford, Son-In –Law) search for it with a metal detector, if you were agreeable to it, of course?

**Iah:** He could, no problem, as long as it’s one of ourselves, I don’t want them strangers coming down from Cork telling us what to do!

**Ann-Marie:** Any other stories about it?

**Iah:** No, when I came around here first there wasn’t much talk about anything—the older generation kept things to themselves! Tim and Margaret (Sis) were in the farmhouse too.

**Ann-Marie:** *And what about Mick's sisters and brothers?*

**Iah:** *He had two brothers Denis and John, John- the last of them, died two years ago, and he had three sisters. Sr. Joachim joined the nuns at fifteen years, I used to write to her in Wales. She was always very quiet. Rose Lawton (O' Leary, Skeaf) told me that she was very quiet in Clogagh School too, so Rose must have been in her class. She was tragically killed by a bus. The other two sisters, Josie and Nora went to England, shur there was nothing here for them. There was no Monks Lane (Restaurant) that time, no hospitals, no buses or taxis. I remember my mother (Barrett's Pub, Innishannon) telling me about American wakes and people crying before going abroad, and quoting a local woman Minnie Coughlan saying; "Christ, what are you crying for Ireland for? With nothing but hunger and ease (no work) like the dog"!*

**Ann-Marie:** *So Iah, in going forward, what improvement would you like to see?*

**Iah:** *Going in is good, all that needs is a clean. Teresa Burke (Séanie's daughter) cuts the grass there regularly. The steps are slippery in winter, with leaves going down, if they were cleaned. Inside where the cross is, if a nice thing was put around it instead of the wire?*

**Ann-Marie:** *I've said that too to Fr. Cremin and he said the parish will help out in going forward. I was thinking that the see-through toughened glass that you'd see around balconies would be lovely (eg. invisirail) you'd still see the altar, and everything? That's if the parish could afford it!*

**Iah:** *That would look lovely, but could you break that?*

**Ann-Marie:** *I don't think so, but the experts on glass would know that. But if it were possible to do, would you have any objection to it being done?*

**Iah:** *No, no, no!*

**Ann-Marie:** *The paint on the cross is peeling too. Do you remember the old cross that was there? What happened to it?*

**Iah:** *It's down in the old place, I stood it up, across the yard and I put shrubs around it. The shrubs are all overgrown now that there's no one there.*

**Ann-Marie:** *Iah, would you have any problem if it were to be put back again at the rock?*

**Iah:** *I think it would be lovely! I must root it out again. I'd love to see it done up and Mass said again soon.*

**Ann-Marie:** *And shur yourself or one of your family could be involved too to make sure ye are happy with everything?*

**Iah:** *That would be good, I'd like that!*

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